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Association of Breast Surgery advice for patients during the COVID19 (coronavirus) outbreak

The Association of Breast Surgery is committed to the ongoing care of all breast patients. These are worrying times for everyone, but even more so for patients who have been diagnosed with, or think they have, breast cancer and are waiting for treatment or an appointment.

Information for breast cancer patients currently on treatment or needing treatment:

Surgeons and oncologists have worked together to come up with guidance about treatment during the COVID19 outbreak.

Factors taken into consideration are:

- 1) The type and features of your cancer
- 2) The risk and potential seriousness of COVID19 during treatment
- 3) The risks and benefits of altered treatment approaches

For those **cancer patients on follow up** your appointments and mammograms are likely to be postponed.

People with breast symptoms waiting for a breast clinic appointment:

There are 2 possible reasons why your appointment may be pushed back, cancelled or converted to a telephone consultation:

- 1) The risk of COVID19 is a greater risk to you and the staff by attending hospital, and the clinicians believe, after looking at your referral that you will come to no harm by waiting.
- 2) With staff redeployment into other areas, staff sickness and self-isolation there is reduced capacity and emergency patients take priority.

Remember:

- Noticing an unusual change does not necessarily mean that you have breast cancer, and most breast changes are not because of cancer. you can read about benign (non-cancer) conditions [here](#)
- Breast cancer in women under 30 is uncommon
- If you are premenopausal and have new lumpiness, especially if it is tender, monitor it until after your next period, if it persists contact your GP
- On its own pain in the breast is not usually a symptom of breast cancer. The pain is commonly caused by either hormonal changes, or pain from the muscle and ribs underneath the breast. Try simple measures like pain relief and a non-underwired,

well-fitting bra. Monitor it for a few months to see if it is hormonal and if it varies with your periods, before contacting your GP

- Nipple discharge of different colours like milky, green or brown can occur in all women especially in smokers and is not associated with increased risk of breast cancer. Bloody discharge that persists beyond 6 weeks especially if it occurs spontaneously (on its own) when you do not squeeze the nipple, merits further investigation but even in this group 9 out of 10 people will not have cancer.
- Long standing asymmetry (the breasts are a different size or shape), itchiness, longstanding nipple inversion, or intermittent nipple inversion where you can pull your nipple out, are also not worrying symptoms.
- Patients worried about history of breast cancer in their family or aesthetic issues regarding the breast will have to wait till after this crisis has passed.

Any symptoms that persist after the COVID19 outbreak has settled down, please contact your GP

Your local breast team will have processes in place to make sure patients that need to be seen, are seen as soon as is possible in the current climate.

The charity Breast Cancer Now has a Helpline you can call free on 0808 800 6000.